

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
COMMONWEALTH HONORS COLLEGE (CHC) COUNCIL

The charge of the Commonwealth Honors College Council is to provide advice to the Dean on all matters relating to the administration of the Honors College, its curriculum and policy, including;

- honors course approvals;
- standards governing the establishment, modification and termination of all Departmental Honors and Multidisciplinary Honors programs;
- standards governing CHC student admission and graduation; and
- standards governing and the direction of Honors theses/projects and independent studies.

Minutes

Date **November 20, 2023 12:20–2:00 PM**

Location **via Zoom** <https://umass-amherst.zoom.us/j/93551699900?pwd=VzN4a0dVMU5Sd1p4ZUdrbWp0QlIKZz09>

Meeting ID: 935 5169 9900 **Passcode:** 955920

Attendance Anthony Paik, Benjamin Marlin, Deepika Marya, Dominick Usher, Elena Carbone, Farshid Hajir, Jean MacKimmie, Kimberly Tremblay, Lynda Schwartz, Mari Castañeda, Melanie Radik, Michael Krezmien, Neal Anderson, Patrick Sullivan, Stacy Giufre, Theresa Dooley, Xavier Aparicio, Valentina Ravaoli, Casey Krone (Minutes)

Approve Minutes Minutes are unanimously approved with 3 abstentions.

Announcements

Updates from the Dean (*Mari Castañeda*)

- CHC is profiling students currently in the thesis experience to help other students learn how to navigate the process. Please see our [Student thesis experience profiles](#)
- CHC and Campus Compact are cosponsoring a new book event in the CHC Events Hall on Friday, December 1, 2023. The Chancellor will give opening remarks and participate in discussions.
 - *ANTI-RACIST COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES*

FRIDAY / DECEMBER 1, 2023

9:30 AM - 12:00 NOON

COMMONWEALTH HONORS COLLEGE EVENTS HALL

UMass Amherst

Join us for the Western Massachusetts launch of the recently published book, “Anti-Racist Community Engagement: Principles and Practices.” We’ll have an authors’ panel and roundtable discussions that explore how faculty, staff, students, and community members can integrate anti-racist principles into their community-engagement practices at UMass Amherst, at regional campuses, and in all our university-community collaborations.

9:30 - 10:00: Networking w/ Coffee & Pastries

10:00 - 11:00: Author Panel and Q&A

11:00 - 12:00: Interactive Roundtable Discussions

- Dean Mari Castañeda, CHC Associate Dean Ann Marie Russell, Doctor Lisa Troy, and ONSA Director Madalina Akli presented “Best Practices in Honors Signature Programs” at the National College Honors Council in Chicago in November 2023. Senior Assistant Dean Dominick Usher attended as well. There was a full house for the presentation. We would like to submit a yearly

panel at this conference, as many people in higher education see UMass/CHC as leaders in the field with best practices, courses, and cocurricular programming. Many other colleges/universities look to us for guidance, ideas, etc. The thing that really stands out in terms of honors is the deep engagement with faculty and other students in the classroom which was reinforced at the conference. Significant to notice is that honors is a place of great joy, happiness, and excitement. There are lots of challenges at colleges and universities across the nation, honors is a space for life affirming and work. Lots of social justice work is taking place as well.

- Hope to attend a regional conference in Albany in Spring 2024 as well. HONORS 201H Ideas that Change the World many folks pointed to this as something that makes CHC stand out. Many want to hear about the Discovery Seminar, and how to make it work. Honors thesis was also an important piece, would think all programs had that requirement but it's not the case at all. We hope to bring students to the regional conference.

New Business

1. Honors Course Review (*Mari Castañeda*)

- See attached course review recommendations.
- Consent Agenda passes unanimously.

2. Honors Curriculum change proposal (*Mari Castañeda/Dominick Usher/Elena Carbone*)

- a. The Council discussed the proposed changes to the CHC curriculum. The previous provost/chancellor had asked CHC to review the curriculum after the thesis requirement was reinstated. While we initially looked at dropping HONORS 391AH (Discovery Seminar) that course is extremely popular with students and faculty so we looked at other aspects of the curriculum. The current proposal keeps key signature curriculum requirements intact.
- b. Feedback we gathered on the curriculum suggested we look at the breadth of study portion. The first part of the proposal is for replacement of ENGLWR112H to be modified to allow any honors course instead of an honors gen ed. Second part of proposal is to reduce the number of requirements in breadth of study by one. Eighty percent of students bring in AP, transfer, or test credits and this results in students enrolling in courses they do not need for their university requirements. These changes would allow students to engage more with the depth of study part of the CHC curriculum.
 - i. Looking at data from students that withdrew from CHC about 38% of them indicated they were withdrawing due to time conflicts. Another 13% indicated that they wanted to focus more time and energy on their major requirements.
- c. Three populations will be positively affected by these changes. External and internal transfers, students with multiple majors, and Pell eligible students. These groups have difficulty completing the full CHC curriculum and thus are unable to earn honors on their diploma as the partial curriculum options only show recognition on the transcript. Pell eligible students often try to complete their degree in less than four years due to financial constraints. These changes will decrease barriers to completing the full CHC curriculum.
- d. A. Paik asked that the proposal background discussed along with potential budget implications be included when the proposal is forwarded to the Faculty Senate. CHC

does not anticipate acceptance of the proposed curriculum changes would lead to a decrease of CHC support for departments to offer honors courses.

- i. Decreasing the number of students opting out of CHC might actually increase the number of seats needed in honors courses.
 - ii. Changing the requirements might allow CHC to shift some resources to upper level honors courses including the thesis seminars.
- e. K. Tremblay voiced concern that this proposal seems more like a major change than a minor change, as well as if the student withdrawal trends will stay the same post-pandemic and with the requirement that all students complete a thesis. Concerned that this is a dilution of the value of the honors degree.
- f. V. Ravaoli expressed the student view that not many students withdraw due to the thesis requirement and that if students are offered the option to take an honors version of a gen ed they would prefer to do that because of the benefits of a smaller class, etc.
 - i. Many students take more than the required number of honors courses.
- g. X. Aparicio addressed the point about removing a requirement would dilute the value of honors but countered that students not having enough time is also a dilution of the honors experience since they leave early or can't complete the curriculum. If they withdraw because they don't have enough time to complete the full curriculum, they don't do the thesis. Students will be able to engage more with their honors experience and the quality will be better.
- h. Discussion of the thesis to satisfy the IE requirement or as part of the 4+1 programs.
- i. A motion to approve the proposal is made and seconded.
- j. K. Tremblay offers an amendment to the proposal – drop the gen ed part of the requirement to replace ENGLWR112H with a gen ed honors course but keep the current number of gen ed courses required at two.
 - i. This motion was not seconded.
- k. The motion to modify the curriculum according to the original proposal passes 13 to 1 with no abstentions.

3. Hybrid lunch meeting for December; RSVP pending (*Casey Krone*)

Any Other Business

- CHC will attach a letter to the proposal in CCMS to include the information that A. Paik suggested be included.

Committee Reports

Reports from CHC Council Representatives on other Councils

1. Academic Standards Committee Review (*Elena Carbone*)
 - a. E. Carbone reviews the current status of ISH, HI, and 499 proposals which are still slowly being submitted. Slightly less thesis proposals Fall 2023 compared to Fall 2022. There will be more thesis seminars in spring 2024 and presumably some individual thesis numbers will be absorbed in thesis seminars then. On target with HI and ISH compared to Fall 2022.
2. Academic Matters Council (*Dominick Usher*)

- a. Seven different program proposals were presented, five approved, two tabled. Six course reviews approved. Other topic of conversation was around revision of the Academic Honesty statement starting with a renaming as the Academic Integrity Statement. A group is working on this and brought it to AMC for discussion. The goal is to do a listening tour around campus of what is proposed for the content in the spring before spring break.

3. Research Council (*Thomas Brashear-Alejandro*) (not in attendance)

Next Meeting

December 11, 2023, 12:20-2:00 pm, Hybrid meeting, CHC Events Hall/Zoom, lunch provided

Attachments

- Honors Course Review materials
- Proposed Honors Curriculum change rationale and copies of current and proposed curriculum
- Minutes from 10/16/2023 meeting

Curriculum and Policy Committee

CHC Curriculum change proposal

November 2023

The profile of incoming first-year CHC students has changed over the years. Over the last decade an average of 80% of all incoming first-year CHC students have entered UMass with many AP credits and an average of 17% have entered UMass with college-level credits from dual enrollment and other similar programs, compared to 43% and 12% respectively for non-CHC, first-year students entering UMass. This has resulted in many incoming first-year students entering UMass having completed most if not all their General Education requirements (Gen Ed).

The current CHC curriculum still requires all CHC students to complete at least one honors Gen Ed to fulfill their CHC requirements, even if they have fulfilled Gen Ed requirements upon arrival at UMass Amherst. Thus, the minor change to the curriculum will allow for more reasonable flexibility of requirement completion while still giving CHC students the opportunity to engage in a Gen Ed courses, especially HONORS 201H: Ideas that Change the World, which will remain as a requirement.

The current CHC curriculum requires CHC students to complete a minimum of 27 credits to complete their CHC requirements, and that is 9 credits more than the minimum of 18 credits required by the state accreditation process. Given that many students enter UMass having fulfilled Gen Ed credits and that many departments aren't able to offer dedicated honors-level classes, it is often hard for CHC students to find classes that make sense for them to fulfill CHC requirements. This can be especially challenging for transfer students, students with double majors or with majors with many requirements and/or many sequential requirements.

A review of CHC withdrawal requests that have been submitted via PATHS since fall 2021 highlights that 38% of students indicated that the primary reason for withdrawing from CHC was not having enough time to complete the requirements. This reason for CHC withdrawal represented the largest percentage of responses. Another 13% of respondents also indicated that they were withdrawing so they could focus more on their major or another area of academic interest. For some portions of those respondents, it is also clear that time constraints were part of their considerations, based on the notes they entered with their withdrawal request.

Given the number of credits that are required for the current CHC curriculum and some of the inflexibility in how those credits are fulfilled, the feeling is that a reimagining of the CHC curriculum that better meets the needs of our current and future students might be in order. To be mindful of both the challenges some CHC students might face in completing the current curriculum and maintaining an academically dynamic and rigorous program, we are proposing two changes; the elimination of one Honors Gen Ed requirement and offering students the option of fulfilling the remaining required honors gen eds with any other honors course options.

The proposed changes would in no way impact how many Gen Eds students complete for their UMass graduation requirements. The proposed changes also wouldn't prohibit any student from fulfilling some of their CHC requirements with Honors Gen Eds, if that is what they wanted to do. They simply wouldn't be limited to only Honors Gen Eds for certain requirements. Students also wouldn't in any way be prohibited from taking more than the required number of honors credits. We would simply be making the possibility of completing the minimum number of credits for the full CHC curriculum a more viable option for more students.

Regarding the viability of completing the full CHC curriculum, there are several populations of students for whom we want to think about this carefully, our students with multiple majors, Pell eligible students, and transfer students. There are currently 2871 active CHC students. Of those 2817 CHC students, 22% have more than one major, 16% are Pell eligible, and 29% are either external or internal transfer students to CHC. Each of these populations of students could be positively impacted by the proposed CHC curriculum change.

Students with more than one major must figure out how to manage the combination of their university requirements, CHC requirements, and requirements for several majors. This can be particularly challenging for students in majors that do not offer many honors options. Pell eligible students are often seeking ways to minimize the cost of their education. As a result, many try to complete their degrees in less than four years. Students who transfer to CHC start their progress through the CHC curriculum behind their peers who entered UMass as CHC students. This makes completing the full CHC curriculum more challenging, and many students must switch to the partial CHC curriculum, which is noted on students' transcripts but not their diplomas. For all these students, a more flexible and manageable CHC curriculum would be helpful.

It is also important to highlight that the most recent CHC curriculum revision made the honors thesis a requirement for all CHC students to graduate with CHC honors, starting with fall 2018 admits. This eliminated the General Studies honors distinction option for students, which only accounted for the Breadth of Study portion of the curriculum. From 2013 through 2021, an average of 30% of CHC graduates were opting to complete only the General Studies curriculum. Requiring the honors thesis for all CHC students was a recent curricular change made to emphasize the importance of and academic rigor involved in Depth of Study portion of the curriculum and within the thesis experience specifically.

Additionally, the majority of current Honors Thesis Seminars require 8 total credits, rather than 6 total credits, as had been more standard in the past. This credit increase accounts for the significant amount of work and investment made by both students and faculty sponsors in the completion of an honors thesis. When accounting for this, the average total number of honors credits CHC students will be graduating with will not look much different than the average prior to the most recent curriculum change.

Copies of both the current and proposed revised curriculum are attached.